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# Reagan reportedly seeks deal

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WASHINGTON — Even as President Reagan continued to lobby Congress for today's critical vote on his proposed \$100 million in aid to the Nicaraguan rebels, the White House was quietly working on a compromise that would rescue it from defeat but delay shipments of arms to the contras.

As private talks continued yesterday, House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill Jr. (D., Mass.), predicted the plan would lose by 10 to 15 votes in the 435-member House.

Presidential spokesman Larry Speakes continued to predict a "very, very close" vote.

Under one compromise being considered by the White House, Reagan would promise a good-faith effort to instigate talks between contra leaders and the Sandinista government in return for House approval of the rebel-aid package.

Under the proposal, special envoy Philip C. Habib would ask the Contadora nations — Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia and Panama — to urge the Sandinistas to begin talks with the rebels. While that effort was made, aid to the contras would be restricted for 90 days to nonlethal assistance and enough military equipment to defend against Sandinista air attacks.

## White House 'listening'

Speakes acknowledged that the administration was "listening" to various proposals to postpone delivery of arms shipments in an effort to lure Nicaragua's Sandinista government into negotiations.

Debate on the proposal got under way in the House yesterday with O'Neill arguing that arming the Nicaraguan rebels ultimately would suck the United States into a war there.

"I see this leading to war," O'Neill said. "I see a quagmire down there."

Minority Leader Robert H. Michel (R., Ill.) responded with equal fervor.

"The Speaker says the President and in general Republicans will never be satisfied until U.S. troops get involved," Michel said. "Let me put that notion to rest. The United States has no intention to send troops to Nicaragua. Our proposal is to help the freedom fighters with military aid and humanitarian aid."

O'Neill, in remarks before debate began, said that despite Reagan's nationally televised speech to the nation Sunday, mail and telephone calls to Congress were still running against the President's proposal to give the contras \$70 million in military aid and \$30 million in nonlethal assistance.

## Potential embarrassment

Because the President's appeal fizzled, O'Neill said, the White House was searching for a compromise to spare the President an embarrassing defeat.

If Reagan's proposal is defeated today, O'Neill said, a different version could be introduced with bipartisan support for consideration in mid-April after Congress returns from the week-long Easter recess that begins March 26.

One compromise that could pass the House, O'Neill said, would but require that the \$70 million in military assistance in the package be delayed for up to four months while the United States tried to engage the Sandinistas in negotiations.

The White House also would have to agree to establishment of a bipartisan commission to monitor the negotiations effort.

Rep. Ike Skelton (D., Mo.) has offered another variation on the same theme in which a small portion of the military aid would be sent to the contras right away to obtain "defensive" weapons, such as shoulder-launched anti-helicopter rockets.

## Schedule of payments

The balance of the \$70 million would be sent at the end of the negotiating period if the White House and Congress concluded that the Sandinistas were unwilling to bargain. The \$30 million in nonlethal aid would be released immediately.

O'Neill rejected the White House's suggestion for a letter or other declaration to Congress committing Reagan to negotiations in exchange for its permission to begin immediate and unfettered shipment of the arms to the contras.

Several Democrats, including Majority Whip Thomas S. Foley (D., Wash.), said the White House made a similar non-binding pledge last year and broke it after Congress provided \$27 million in nonlethal aid to the contras.

Reagan maintains that he has made many attempts to negotiate with the Sandinistas but was repeatedly rebuffed.

But Rep. Jim Chapman (D., Texas) said Tuesday that CIA analysts had told him in a briefing that U.S. disputes with Nicaragua could be settled only by the overthrow of the Sandinista government.

The CIA officials, Chapman said, made it clear that "they are convinced there will be no diplomatic solution in Nicaragua," although Reagan describes aiding the rebels as a means of pressuring the Sandinistas to negotiate.

Chapman is one of several members who say they are undecided on the issue, and the administration has mounted intense pressure on him and the others.